From: John B. Pormann
To: Microsoft ATR
Date: 1/23/02 1:40pm
Subject: Microsoft Settlement

As a computer professional, I would like to add my comments to those being collected towards the final settlement with Microsoft Corporation.
Please note that these opinions are my own and should not be construed to reflect on my employer, Duke University.

Ralph Nader and James Love put forth a number of good comments in their open letter, available at:

http://www.cptech.org/at/ms/rnjl2kollarkotellynov501.html

Perhaps most critical of these points is the fact that Microsoft has repeatedly used proprietary file formats to thwart interoperability efforts with other platforms. In some cases, this obfuscation of file formats has been extreme enough that THEIR OWN PRODUCTS have not interoperated across different versions. One particular example occurred when their MS Word 5 product could not read files created under MS Word 6. This apparently happened again between Word 6 and the Office 97 release.

By repeatedly changing file formats and NOT publishing the new formats in a timely manner (if ever), Microsoft imposes a significant hurdle upon other companies that wish to compete in the marketplace. Such competition is simply not present in the market today, with the end result that users have THEIR OWN DATA tied up in Microsoft's proprietary file format.

By tying a user's data into a proprietary format, Microsoft inhibits a user's ability to move, or even test, their business operations on other vendor products. If a budget spreadsheet is in the MS Excel format, you must use MS Excel to read or analyze it, even though other, perhaps better, analysis methods could be developed outside of MS Excel. Note that this is THE USER'S DATA, not Microsoft's. This is data that could be critical to the operation of their business, and it is tied up in Microsoft proprietary file formats. Thus, the user must spend additional resources, both time and money, to regain access to THEIR OWN DATA if they switch to a competing vendor.

I suggest that additional thought be given to imposing some form of standards to Microsoft's file formats, either:

   1. forcing Microsoft to only use file formats approved by an INDEPENDENT standards body; or

   2. forcing Microsoft to publish their file formats, including a

reference implementation, to encode and decode such formats, available in
a platform-independent source code format

In either case, Microsoft's adoption or creation of a new file format
should be published WELL BEFORE the sale of any new computer program so
that competing vendors have the opportunity to interoperate with the
standard at the time the Microsoft product hits the market.

Thank you for the opportunity to share these thought with you.

John

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